



STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND  
AGRICULTURE  
1220 N Street, Room A-372  
Sacramento, CA 95814

## PEST EXCLUSION ADVISORY

NO. 30-2003

DATE: November 26, 2003  
TO: All County Agricultural Commissioners  
FROM: Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services  
SUBJECT: Giant African Snails Found by USDA

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has alerted State agricultural officials to an interception of over 100 specimens of the Giant African Snail (*Achatina fulica*) in pet stores and with private breeders in Wisconsin. The Giant African Snail is a federal-action pest, and is A-rated in California. Although known to be established in Hawaii, the Giant African Snail is illegal to possess in the continental United States.

Giant African Snails are reported to be for sale on the Internet by commercial businesses and private citizens, as well as available at exotic animal shows and swap meets. These snails may enter the United States as hitchhikers on imported cargo, and are frequently intercepted by the USDA at airports from arriving international travelers who may consume the snails as meat or folk medicine, or who want to keep them as pets.

The Giant African Snail is an agricultural pest, and can cause extensive damage to plants in tropical and subtropical agricultural systems and the environment (see PEA 9-2002 for more biology). These snails can also carry parasites (*Angiostrongylus cantonensis*, and *A. costaricensis*) that can cause serious diseases in humans including meningitis. The diseases can be contracted by ingesting improperly cooked snail meat, or by handling live snails and transferring the snail mucus to human mucus membranes (eyes, nose, and mouth).

In April 2002, Los Angeles County agricultural inspectors intercepted a single Giant African Snail on nursery stock from Hawaii. Due to the potential health risks associated with handling the Giant African Snails, the following handling and disposal procedures, provided by the USDA, should be followed when handling all suspicious snail samples:

- Use latex gloves when handling specimens
- Suspicious snail samples should be sent to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Plant Pest Diagnostics Laboratory for identification
- All specimens should be submitted to the lab in alcohol 6-8 times the volume of the snail body
- To destroy seized snails and their eggs, put snails in freezer (-10° C) for three days; or
- Boil; or
- Immerse in alcohol (rubbing alcohol or ethanol)

It is recommended by the USDA to collect and incinerate, or autoclave all soil and debris from terrariums holding Giant African Snails, and to disinfest tanks with alcohol or full strength bleach.

County inspectors should routinely inspect nursery stock from Hawaii, pet stores, reptile shows, and swap meets for the Giant African Snail, and should notify CDFA Interior Pest Exclusion headquarters immediately if any Giant African Snails are found.



If you have any questions concerning this advisory, you may contact any Interior Program agricultural biologist at (916) 653-1440, or by e-mail at [ljohnson@cdfa.ca.gov](mailto:ljohnson@cdfa.ca.gov).